



The Interspecies Newsletter

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The One That Got Away

All we're trying to do with newsletter finances is break even. We're almost there for 1994, so help us achieve our goal, won't you? If your membership has lapsed, please make it current. If you appreciate this little quarterly, and you receive it free—for any reason—why not send in a membership. If you don't want to send in a full \$25—for any reason—send in something less. But send in something. Thanks in advance.

—The Editor

Twelve of us pitched our tents on a dot of an island off the northeast coast of Vancouver Island. We spent our nights playing music on a boat wired up as an underwater recording studio, conducting interspecies music with the pods of orcas who frequented the area. During the day we worked at creating a wilderness community. We'd brought along an assortment of vegetarian camp food whose main attribute was its ability to remain palatable over the month long camp. You could tell what day it was by the food on the table. At the beginning of the trip there were huge salads, fresh peaches, broccoli. By the third week we were eating potatoes, carrots, rice, beets, corn bread. It was mostly then that I found myself out on the water trying to augment our end-of-camp diet by catching fresh fish.

One afternoon I poked around camp, asking if anyone would join me for an hour out in the inflatable boat while I tried to catch dinner. Gabriel, our resident optimist, volunteered, offering to run the engine over and back to the fishing hole. Sandra spoke up next, punning that everyone knows how much I could use a good networker. We piled the tackle box, the rod and reel, and the oversized net into the inflatable boat, and proceeded to motor a mile up the coast to a favorite fishing hole. The afternoon was sunny, the tide high and slack. I sorted through the tangle of metallic spoons before selecting a five-inch charcoal and white lead missile known as a *buzz bomb*. I dropped it over the side and let it unwind off the reel for a good half minute before it hit bottom. My best estimates placed it on a rocky ledge about 100 feet down. I began pulling up on the tip of the fishing rod before



dropping it again. The idea is to get the lure darting erratically—what fishermen refer to as *the action*. It's a bit like talking on the telephone. But rather than sending our voice down the string in search of an interspecies dialogue with some fish, we send our dance. Fishermen are puppeteers. Good fishermen are good puppeteers. And a buzz bomb is a herring marionette that reflects nothing much else beside our own vitality attached to some string.



Within seconds I hooked a fish that arched the rod over double. I stood up in the boat, set my feet, started cranking the reel. Every time, the fish lunged, I found myself incapable of controlling the pliable rod tip which soon bent double into the water. Fishing line galloped off the reel. I turned the handle once, twice, ten times, always careful to allow the fish to match my mechanically-compensated prowess with whatever juice it could muster from within its own survival-prone frame.

The Gift

But really folks. Permit me to turn down the volume. If any heroic emotion is meant to be transferred between myself as author and you as reader, then I prefer it not to be thrills, but rather probity, perhaps a sense of burden. All the manly writers filling up the pages of magazines like *Field and Stream* and *Outside* would have us believe that so-called "sportsfishing" is a wonderful game. But the "game" itself, the fish, too often gets cast in the role of a caricature of a living creature. Fish as the object of a Sunday's recreation. Fish as boredom pill. Fish as wall decoration.

I have never any interest in killing fish to assuage boredom. Nor do I find either recreation or reason to indulge in catch-in-release as an end in itself. I prefer to countenance my trophies in colorful rocks utilized as paperweights. But I'm not a political animal rightist. I fish for food. As a fisher of fish, I recognize the responsibilities that accrue whenever we snuff out a life to nourish our own.

My mentors in this killing business are the native people who understood the hunt as the ultimate gift of life force from one being to another. Ecology, economy, religion, killing fish: the concepts were once viewed as interchangeable aspects of culture. Humans and animals existed as interpenetrating aspects of the larger ecological community: Gaia. Vernacular people never killed more than they needed to survive. Food was a gift granted them by the spirit of the slain. That which was once outside, was taken inside. To honor the gift insured more gifts.

It is said of the traditional Inuit beluga

whale hunter, that he refrained from doing work or having sex for four days after a kill because that was the precise amount of time the animal's ghost lingered near the carcass. No one in the village could use a sharp object for fear of wounding the ghost, no one made a loud noise for fear of frightening it. If the ghost was offended, bad luck and even death might visit the village. This would result in still more ritualized injunction.

Some people label such anecdotes "superstition"—which is, after all, a modern concept—and then find easy grounds to dismiss it as such. But whatever we choose to call it, let's recognize that native ritual usually upheld a linkage between human being and place. Animals were never killed indiscriminantly. A sensibility to the circle of life insured the preservation of the prey species. The preservation of the species likewise insured the survival of the people.

The gift keeps moving.

Although any gift-giving dance between human and fish creates its own unforeseen dynamic, fishing writers who describe that action as if it were a fair contest are about as forthright as the announcers of the Gulf War. In this, my own fish story, I do not wish to measure the importance of the event in terms of the adrenalin it pools in my male tissue. Not to mean that I am going out of my way to be a pompous ass. Anyone who denies the genuine excitement implicit in hooking a mammoth fish hasn't been there. But no fish possesses a just counter either to my mechanically enhanced strength or my experience.

The fishy opponent has but two options. Pull until the line breaks. Or conversely, swim directly at the line to generate enough slack to extricate a poorly set hook. Unfortunately my line is strong and I know my knots cold. I also know the first law of fishing which states that once a fish is hooked, never let the line go slack. And if I make a mistake? At worst I lose a fresh fish dinner and maybe a few modest moments of deflated self-esteem. The fish loses, as the Spanish say so well: *todo el mundo*.

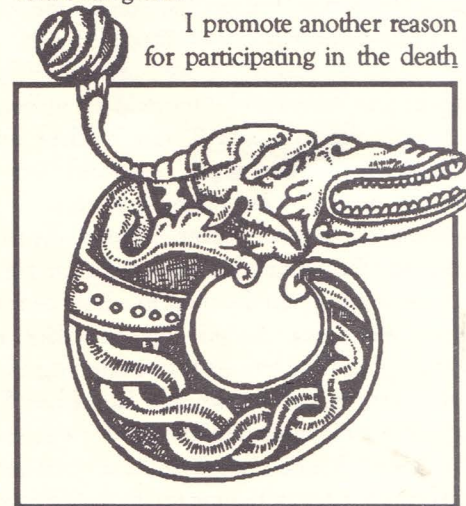
All the world.

This particular fish who knew everything there is to know about surviving sluggishly in a cold, dark, pressurized hole, knew next to nothing about freeing itself from a sharp treble hook attached to a monofilament fishing line. Now I cranked the line more vigorously, easing a very large fish off its midnight universe. Ever upwards into the heady light of day.

Most any fish brought to the surface from a hundred feet or more quickly loses its ability to swim as its air sac expands in the declining water pressure. This sac sometimes inflates so much that it pushes through the fish's mouth like a swollen tongue. The fish is soon unable to navigate. It floats upwards with the slow grace of a helium balloon. By the time it attains the surface, it's insides are outside. And it is already well on its way to dying. In this instance, my victim suddenly ceased all fighting maneuvers at a distance about halfway to the surface. The line went limp. I reeled it in like a submerged blimp on a string.

Fishing writers remind us that the most dramatic moment of the fishing experience occurs at first sight of the prey. Human curiosity is satisfied. We identify the catch as this or that species. Such a vision/bonding also assures that we participate in the death throes of a fellow creature who happens to be a fish. Some people seem to like staring at a fish lying on the deck of a boat void of all grace. They study it like a scientist. Pry up the sharp bones in its dorsal fin. Poke at the air sac with their finger tips. Rub the scales. Touch the eye. What they fail to recognize is that satisfying such curiosity is also an act void of all grace.

I promote another reason for participating in the death



firearm ornament

throes of a fish out of water. It is at this juncture that we either seize or forsake the critical obligation that exists between predator and prey.

The dark shape rose from the depths nearly upside-down and backwards, all of its hefty body following in helpless pursuit of a monstrosity distended belly. Eventually, the dim shadow waving through the monochrome of the clear water gradually took on substance and then hue. It accrued the unmistakable vermilion flush of a yelloweye rockfish, perhaps the best white-meat bottom fish in this part of the world. The creature popped to the surface, bobbing on the still waters like a red beachball. Sandra took the net and attempted to lift the red, spiny alien into the boat. It was too heavy. Gabriel stepped in to help. The two of them heaved, deposited the huge body onto the floor of the boat. It landed with a dull thud. Ironically, the hook immediately fell out of the fish's mouth. The three of us sighed. And then fell silent. We nearly cried.

Grandmother

The yelloweye rockfish (*Sebastes ruberimus*), misleadingly known in these parts as a red snapper, looks like a refugee from a tropical coral reef. Just about every other fish found in these northern waters is gun-metal grey, mottled brown, or shiny silver. The yelloweye is the exception, a brilliant red-orange, square-shaped body tinged with sharp hints of mustard yellow set off by flashes of the purest white. Its mouth is ungainly, easily capable of swallowing a meal half as large as itself. If human beings possessed a mouth and lips like that, they could gobble up a loaf of bread in one easy bite. Apply lipstick from an aerosol can.

The eyes stop me cold. They are utterly enormous, glowing flat yellow orbs with dime-sized jet-black pupils. This fish must see objects clear as day where we dull humans perceive nothing but darkest night.

The Yelloweye is a solitary creature, living out its life around one small nesting area. There, the female of the species may bear up to three million live young each year. At such an inconceivable rate of

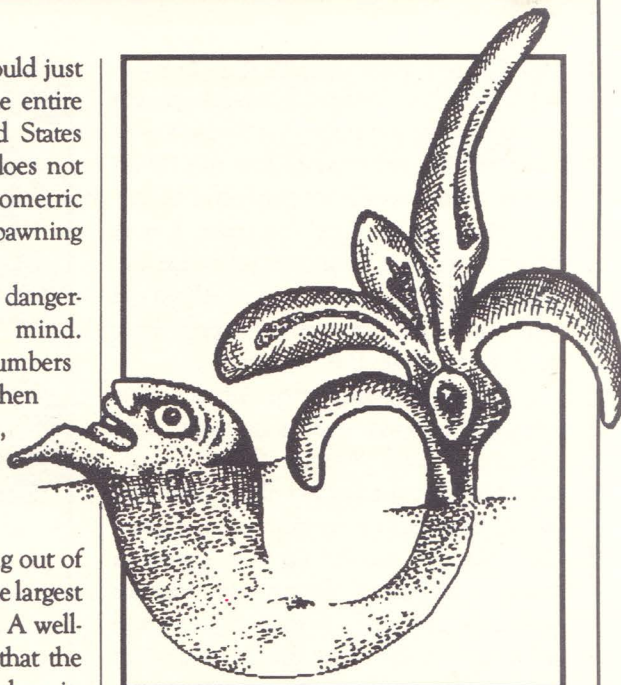
reproduction, a fertile yelloweye could just about spawn the equivalent of the entire human population of the United States during a single lifetime. Yet this does not even take into account the geometric spawning of the next generation spawning the next generation.

But statistics is nothing but a dangerous plaything of the human mind. Numbers that unfold into other numbers rarely act according to formula when confronted by evolution. As it is, almost none of that spawn ever lives long enough to reach a size larger than a human incisor.

This bloated creature shivering out of control on the deck of the boat is the largest yelloweye I have ever laid eyes on. A well-known ID book will later reveal that the yelloweye "reaches up to 36 inches in length". This one is three or four inches longer than that. It is that rarest of rare survivors, the one fish in a billion-billion. I will later learn that yelloweye live up to a hundred years. This fish may be as old as Sandra, Gabriel and I put together. Usually I feel a sense of accomplishment at landing such a large fish. This time, my spirits plummet. How dare I kill such a magnificent being for the totally inappropriate purpose of serving it up in a sauce of garlic and lemon juice? If I had the choice, I would no more will such a fish onto my hook than I would cut down a three hundred foot tall redwood tree.

Sandra is frowning. Gabriel is shaking his head. My own mind is in utter disarray. Take it back! Please! Take it back! We don't want it! The three of us watch the quivering, distended animal for what seems like a very long time. Is it Sandra who speaks first? "I guess it's better to sacrifice one large fish than four or five smaller ones."

Finally I speak directly to the fish, "I am sorry. I just wish there was some way I could throw you back." More sighs all around. Slowly, I return to the reality of the situation, pick up a wooden paddle. Like so many other things about fishing, the *coup de grace* serves two unrelated functions. First, is the act of pure mercy; animal liberation at its most swift and brutal. Second, the immediacy of the kill insures that the flesh retains its freshness. I crouch



from *Napoleon in the Desert* by Max Ernst

down beside the fish and turn its plated, bony face towards my own, noticing for the first time that its other yellow eye has hemorrhaged halfway out of its socket from that same catastrophic alteration in water pressure. Whack!!! Strike once. Then again, whack!!! on the hard ridge between those golfball-sized eyes. The animal's vivid coloration instantly metamorphoses to a dull orange. Gives up its color. Then its life. Lies still. Done. Over. Complete.

Without any further ado, Gabriel yanks on the outboard and heads us back up the coast. The three of us have nothing to say to one another.

Trophies

On August 4, 1953, Alfred C. Glassell Jr. caught and landed a 1560 pound, fourteen foot six inch black marlin off the coast of Peru. I learned about his triumph from a photo in a fishing magazine published five years after that event when I was eleven. I tacked the black and white photo of Alfred posed beside his marlin up onto my bedroom wall where it remained for over a year. Mostly, I was impressed by the sheer disparity in size between the two beings. Alfred stood no taller than the marlin's formidable bill, which was identical in proportions to his tree trunk of a fishing rod. I transformed the man's

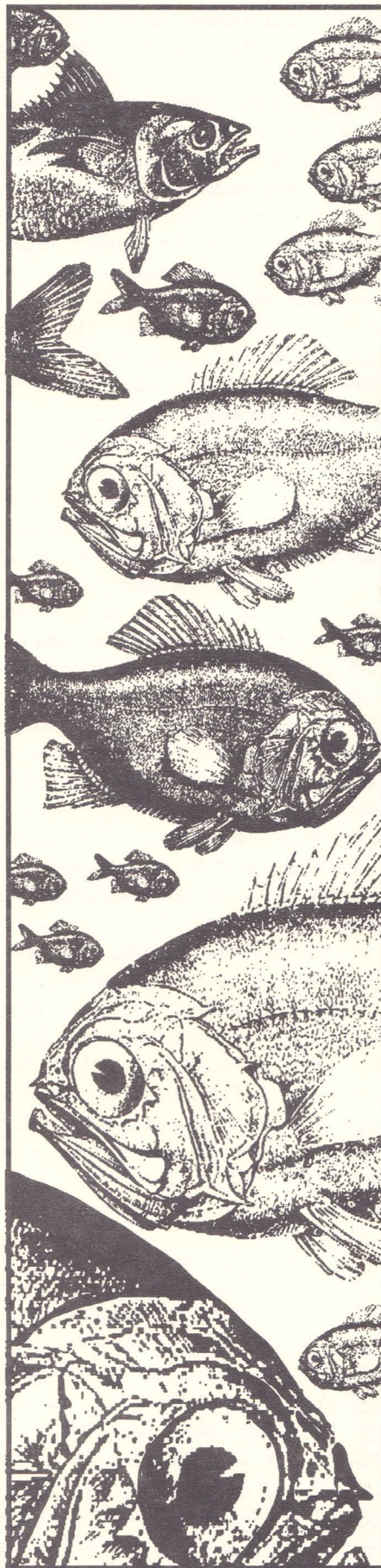
sweet victory scene into an object of pre-adolescent veneration. I examined the fetish daily in the hope that Alfred's own fantastic luck might somehow rub off on me as I fished locally for perch and trout.

Now zooming up the coast, I stare down at my own behemoth yelloweye and wonder what in heaven's name Alfred did with such a fish. How many people did it feed? Five hundred? A thousand?

Actually, I doubt that Alfred's prize ever encountered such a utilitarian and democratic end. Trophy fishing is not about food or sharing but about men who would be gods. It is the expression of latter-day aristocrats tangled up in the modern myth of nature as a playing field. Animals are placed on this Earth for us to enjoy and conquer. To the victor goes a larger than life trophy capable of demonstrating that one man, if but for a brief moment, can also appear larger than life.

Alfred's trophy was almost certainly offered up to the taxidermist. Flesh parted from skin like a banana from its peel. However, the metaphor of the banana does not serve us well because only a small proportion of the meat, the nourishment, the banana, is ever eaten. In this case it is the skin, the peel, that is valuable. This is stretched around a form and treated with chemicals. Finally, the newly reconstructed configuration of a fish is painted and varnished in an attempt to synthesize the vibrancy that was once a marlin. Perhaps Alfred's own relic hangs, even today, upon the stuccoed wall of some Peruvian resort. There it continues to serve any trophy's primary function: at once taunting, challenging and inspiring the imagination of each succeeding generation of trophy fishermen. In imperfect emulation of a real fish, the trophy of a marlin is also capable of reproducing its own kind; spawning more trophies; sustaining the useless killing of ever greater numbers of marlin.

The preserving of large animal carcasses for human display is certainly nothing unique to our culture. There are caves scattered high in the Swiss Alps that served as Neanderthal ceremonial sites fifty thousand years ago. Some grottoes inside the caves were utilized as workshops for the fashioning of tools associated with the bear hunt, while other grottoes served as



sanctuaries for the worship of the bears killed. These rooms contain slab cabinets where even today one can still view the cave bear skulls. Anthropologist Emil Bächler, discoverer of several of these caves, has commented about the "pious treatment of the largest, handsomest bones of spoils of the hunt, establishing the cave as a sanctuary, shut off by a taboo. In any case, they have nothing to do with the usual hoarding of bones of the hunt."

Paleolithic cave chapels are deemed significant because they offer up the relics of the earliest known expression of human religion. Interesting, but one must wonder if the exuberance of the Neanderthal cult caused the eventual extinction of the cave bear. And because that extinction of bears transmuted Neanderthal religion, maybe it then precipitated the parallel extinction of the Neanderthal race. How does that circular hypothesis prophecy the fate of another culture, our own, that has spent the last hundred years "mounting" all the largest representatives of all the species until the museums are bursting while the habitats are empty. It may be no accident that in the 40 years since Alfred first laid eyes on his own hooked marlin, not another one that size has ever been caught.

Motoring up the coastline with the outboard whining in my ears, I wonder if Alfred experienced any of the dismay that I feel as I stare into the outlandishly exploded eyeballs of this red-orange champion fish. Did he stare along the Marlin's improbable length and feel unnerved by the nagging suspicion that his fishing enthusiasm had mysteriously transformed into fishing greed? Did he ever question the death of a marlin as a life taken in vain?

I would be surprised to learn that Alfred struggled with any emotions of the sort. Anyone who chose the incredible expense and trouble of finding his way onto a Peruvian marlin charter back in the early 1950's seems an unlikely candidate to release a world record fish back to the ocean before it was measured and photographed. No purpose of humble compassion stood a chance of competing with the immediate necessity of quantifying all of those impressive numbers for the sake of posterity and *The Information Please Almanac*.

Like a snake biting its tail, the dying marlin apotheosized into its statistics. And even today, those record numbers serve our culture as a memorial meant to validate the slaughtering of a grandfather for no purpose beside fulfilling human vanity.

I stare at the yelloweye rockfish and cringe at the seductiveness of that magazine photograph from my childhood. It enchanted me so thoroughly that it has taken the kiss of death from another trophy fish to finally break the spell.

Fish Eating

Sandra, Gabriel, and I arrived back at camp where I enacted the common ritual of hooking my finger under the fish's lower jaw to bear the heavy carcass along its final physical journey over the slippery rocks to our makeshift wilderness kitchen. As usual, everyone flocked to the viewing. Most of my campmates seemed happy that I had caught such a hefty prize. A firm, white-meat fish was always a happy addition to a camp dulled by beets and cabbage and soy burgers.

Unfortunately, no amount of congratulation was able to fully attenuate my gnawing discomfort. I tentatively asked Sandra if she might like to shoot off a few pictures. "No", she answered rather tartly, "I don't want to remember this fish as a photograph." So what to do but walk back to the kitchen only to hear my friends offering up four vastly different estimations of the fish's weight: twelve pounds, twenty pounds, twenty-five pounds, thirty pounds.

There the matter stood: no weigh-in, no photos; nothing more than an opportunity in myth-making, a sharp knife, and a seasoned ability to quickly separate flesh from backbone. Together, the fish

and I seemed to be making a mockery of the contemporary human foible that demands a precise assignation of numbers and validating photographs to the very largest of our animal sacrifices. But I do have the story.

That night, just before dinner, I spoke to the camp of my turmoil. Yes, I would have set the yelloweye free if I'd had the chance. And yet there was no point to prolonging my self-pity over a deed already accomplished. This day had served up one of those rare unexpected revelations about life. Something that always seemed worthy and prestigious when judged from a distance, now turned out to be shallow and self-defeating when experienced directly. I asked that we each consider this dinner as a gift from a special being.

Let us exit this parable with that image of a circle of two-legged fish-eaters standing around a crackling campfire, waiting patiently for one of their more verbose members to finish up his little speech. Look at their faces. Isn't it obvious that they all want to sit down and enjoy their dinner before it gets too cold. Speech completed, our yelloweyed teacher transforms into dinner. She has been marinated for three hours in lemon juice, garlic, and dill. Laid on a bed of aluminum foil carefully poked with holes to let the smoke filter through, covered on top with a loose umbrella of more foil, and then barbecued over a smoky alder fire. Served over rice, almonds, and carrots. The next morning at breakfast (yelloweye omelets), several people made a point of informing me that in their considered opinion, last night's meal had been the very best fish dinner of the entire monthlong expedition.

And just like an Inuit beluga hunter, four days later I fished again.

—Jim Nollman

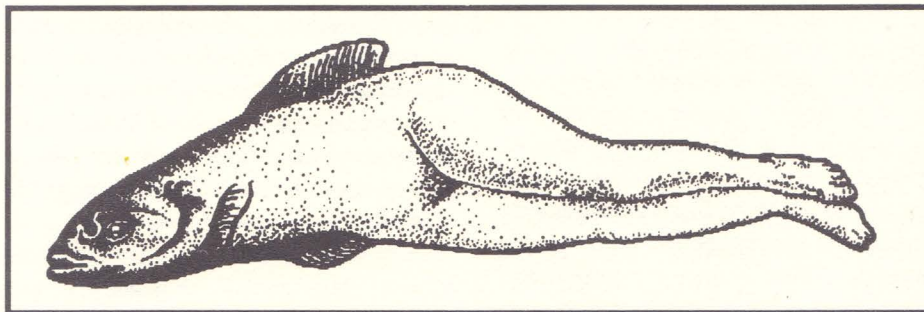
Canary Island Workshop

Interspecies Communication Inc. and the good ship *Kairos* are co-sponsoring a ten day workshop in the Canary Islands. It will be held onboard their sailboat, a 90 foot ketch, from December 12th to 22nd 1994. Over the past year, with aid and consultation from IC, the *Kairos* crew has been slowly developing a co-creative communication relationship with the pods of pilot whales and bottlenose dolphins that frequent the channel between the islands of Tenerife and Gomera. Recent news describes the crew swimming with both species nearly everyday, while continuing to develop a musical exchange with the pilot whales through the boat's wonderful underwater sound system. The water is warm there in winter, not unlike Hawaii.

So what's the workshop about? Join Interspecies Communication co-leaders Jim Nollman and Gigi Coyle in an exploration of interspecies community through music, council, silence, and whale interaction. Men, women, and children over six years old are invited onboard the *Kairos* to deepen our understanding of the cetaceans and the ocean. A twenty-four hour solo fast in the huge dormant crater of the 14,000 foot Teide volcano will provide a time for intensive reflection. The workshop culminates in a celebration of the Winter Solstice. Together we shall try to find seeds of inspiration to carry us into the new year. Bring any instrument you like to play. Or bring one you have never played before but always wanted to try.

There are twelve spaces available. We've decided to charge a sliding scale of \$1000 to \$1400. That way, we hope to offer scholarships to two worthy people who can't afford the cost of the workshop. You have to get yourself there, most likely through Madrid. Meals will be vegetarian.

Expensive? Yes, but then none of us are getting paid. If the cost seems prohibitive, consider finding a sponsor. Contact Gigi Coyle for more information and ideas at (805)635-8086. Or write IC soon.



from *Collective Invention* by René Magritte

Reviews

The Way

An Ecological Worldview

by Edward Goldsmith,
Shambhala Publications, 1993

I'm embarrassed to admit that I've grown bored of reading the six or eight book-length rehashes of environmental philosophy that pass across my desk each year. But I continue to hunger for any fresh insights on a subject that affects our future like no other. This book is the best I've seen in over a year. It's written in an academic style, and at times it can be slow-going. But its thesis is absolutely riveting. Goldsmith uses methodical logic to clarify how and why, ever since the industrial revolution, the best minds of science, economics, and politics have been picking apart the planet like wings off a fly.

Goldsmith's hero is the same hero as the fish story: the native cultures worldwide that recognized implicitly that economic activity, technology, community, and education all serve Gaia.

...the need to recycle materials was built into the cultural pattern of all traditional peoples. It was not seen as a scientific requirement but as a moral one.

...According to the rules established by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trades (GATT), the crops a country produces must be exported as long as a market demand exists. Only when malnutrition and hunger prevail can an exception be made, and U.S. delegates insist that even in such dire circumstances food must continue to be exported. If they have their way, it will then be GATT-illegal for a country to feed its starving people, rather than export it to the already overfed. It is only by doing so that it can maximize its expenditure on the manufactured goods of the industrial countries that control GATT.

This illustrates a principle: production governed by 'market forces' is not designed

to satisfy biological, social, or ecological needs. Kenneth Lux points out that economists must deny the very existence of such needs if modern economic theory is to make any sense at all. The market is seen as catering only for our 'wants' which, when backed up by solid cash are reflected in 'effective demand'; a country is seen as being 'self-sufficient' once 'effective demand' is satisfied.

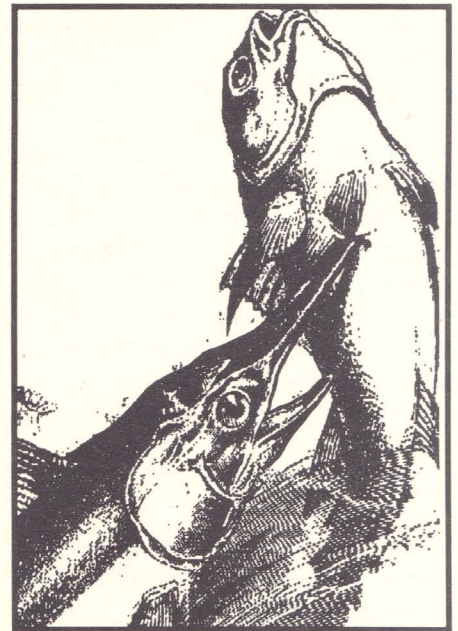
...In Bangladesh frogs were being caught in vast numbers and exported to satisfy the very considerable market for frogs legs in France. The result was a population explosion for all the insects on which the frogs fed, leading to a massive increase in the use of pesticides required for controlling them. Eventually, it is said the cost in pesticides became greater than the income derived from selling frogs.

...Once human life came to be treated as a commodity, work ceased to be embedded in social relation—and the 'whole man' was replaced by the worker, a new category altogether. Whereas vernacular man—the whole man—is a member of his family and community, the worker lives in a largely atomized society and can be mobilized to fulfill any function—however socially and ecologically disruptive or morally repulsive it might be—so long as it provides the wage on which he becomes increasingly dependent for the satisfaction of his most basic biological and social needs.

Beyond the Hundredth Meridian

by Wallace Stegner,
a penguin paperback, 1992

Exploring was the subject of a recent *Interspecies* newsletter. It's always been an important aspect of our field expeditions. In this book, Stegner recounts the successes and frustrations of nineteenth century geologist John Wesley Powell, whose trips down the Colorado River were among the classic explorations of the American West. It was a hundred and twenty years ago that Powell tried to warn



his contemporaries of the dangers of economic exploitation of the West and he spent a good deal of his life overcoming Washington politics in getting that message across. This book goes far beyond biography, and into the very soul of our American creed of exploration.

... Other western explorations had met Indians, buffalo, and antelope and elk, grizzlies; had passed alertly through a wilderness that teemed with life. Their own had passed through a wasteland naked even of game, sometimes even of vegetation, and its trademark was the ancient and terrible stillness which was all they heard now.

...Out of the studies of Powell and his collaborators came records: reports, photographs, sketches, geological sections, and the maps that were as essential to geology, Powell said, as a house was to housekeeping.

...Primitive cosmologies and mythologies, Powell said, persisted in more advanced stages of society in the same way that vestigial organs persisted in the body. Evolution worked upon institutions as it worked upon the physical organism, but it worked irregularly and slowly.

A History of Whaling

by Ivan T. Sanderson
Barnes and Noble Books, 1993

Although we generally think that human culture's association with whaling began two centuries ago, in fact people have been hunting the whale incessantly for at least ten thousand years.

This is an extraordinary book that somehow manages to connect Edward Goldsmith's theme of economies-out-of-synch with nature and Wallace Stegner's theme of the drives that cause men to explore the unknown. After all, whaling has always been about spending months and sometimes years out of sight of land. Sanderson writes with the heart of a poet and the mind of a historian. And with much compassion for the unwieldy fate of both the whales and the oceans.

...To follow the whale is to follow the whole course of one of the most important and significant aspects of our own history. It is virtually the story of the conquest of the planet.

...A stranded whale would thus provide a heaven-sent bounty to a Stone Age man. The oil would provide light and probably heat. Houses and perhaps boats were built with the ribs and long bones of the jaw and skull. The meat could be eaten fresh, or in cold weather, stored for the winter...The skins covering the liver were made into drum heads; the guts were shredded and used as twine for sewing skins; the baleen was carved or softened in hot water into a great number of useful things. Sinews from the tail flukes were used then as they are today to bind stone and bone tools to shafts. In fact, whales must have been taken apart completely and every bit of them used by prehistoric man.

...The true oceans are great areas of apparently permanent depression that have never been dry land. Their rocky bottoms are said to be covered with the second layer of the Earth's surface known as the *Sima*, (silicon and magnesium predominating) ...All the rest of the water constitutes seas which are quite different.

Sierra

the magazine of the Sierra Club

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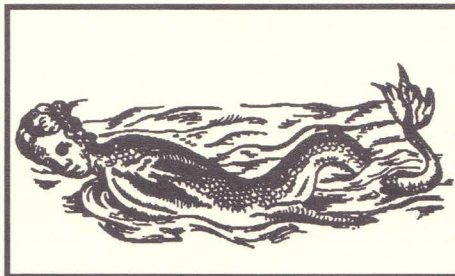
In a world with far too many magazines, and far too few of them worth the trees needed to publish them, this one is a jewel. And you don't have to be a member to get it. Extraordinary photographs, real and timely environmental news, great features, and a generous measure of compassionate first-person nature writing makes for a winning mix. Among the magazine's more endearing traits is its nourishment of members' talent, showcased through its annual nature writing and photography contests. The magazine never tries to gloss over the issue-driven angst that continually divides the minds and hearts of its membership.

Sierra's last page is devoted to a unique feature that poses a genuinely provocative environmental question to its well-educated, activist readership. In the issue in front of me the question is: *Should access to abortion be part of a nation's family-planning strategy?* Next month's question is: *Do you shop, cook, and eat in keeping with your environmental values. If not, why not?*

Why not, indeed.

Imagine what a more interesting place the TV tube would be if the likes of *Frontline* and the PBS news hour made the same use of interviewing intelligent real people instead of the perennially male, urban, think-tank oriented, talking heads we've all come to expect as experts.

...Yes, and abortion should be covered under any new health care plan. We don't need a million and half more births yearly to mothers who don't want more children.



Woodcut of mermaid, circa 1550

...Yes, we do need to curb population growth, but abortion is not the answer. Abortion is merely a destructive way of shunning our duty to responsibly (and compassionately) manage our families and environment.

...Abortion results in only a slight dip in population growth. Ending immigration and establishing a "you want 'em, you pay for 'em" policy on childbearing could trim our population to a sustainable level.

Star Trek The Next Generation

Speaking of the TV tube, this show, now in endless re-runs, may tackle the question of living in nature and communicating with other species better than anything else on television.

One recent episode focused on a yelloweye-looking race who seem to half-speak English. The prepositions and verbs are the same as ours, but the nouns are all proper names while lingual concepts are founded on metaphors taken from unknown historical events. Captain Picard is kidnapped, coerced on pain of death to learn how to communicate to this species. By the end of the hour, the viewing audience has learned an intriguing step-by-step lesson in how to communicate with another species.

The show also buoys my outlook about the Earth my children's grandchildren are bound to inherit. The 24th century crew onboard the starship are continually reminding other alien races that the human race nearly destroyed itself way back in the 20th century by fouling its own nest. Humanity saved itself only by learning how to respect nature, respect other races and cultures, control its own population, and elevate women to the status of equals. The immediate result was the virtual elimination of violence.

Don't be fooled into watching the original *Star Trek*. It's far less entertaining in the execution of its surrealistic themes. By contrast, *The Next Generation*, is downright visionary in the farflung metaphors it offers to help us get a creative handle on the real problems we face now, today.